



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
JUDICIAL BRANCH

CHAMBERS OF  
BARBARA M. QUINN  
CHIEF COURT ADMINISTRATOR

231 CAPITOL AVENUE  
HARTFORD, CT 06106

**Testimony of Judge Barbara M. Quinn  
Appropriations Committee  
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Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Miner and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Barbara Quinn, Chief Court Administrator, and I appreciate the opportunity to come before you today to discuss the proposed budget for the Judicial Branch for the upcoming FY14 and FY15 biennium.

The proposed budget for the Judicial Branch is austere, but I know that is true as well for each budgeted agency. I must say that the task you and the Legislature as a whole face seems incredibly daunting, and before I discuss specifics of our budget I want to acknowledge the difficulty of the work you do and assure you that we have confidence in how you will ultimately treat the Judicial Branch.

I have been the Chief Court Administrator since 2007, and I do not recall any budget year since that time that has not been characterized by budget shortfalls, mid-year rescissions and deficit mitigation plans. The current fiscal year is certainly no exception and it appears that we will face similar challenges in the next biennium.

The Judicial Branch has shouldered its fair share of budget cuts over the past several years. To illustrate this point, consider that our current services budget request for the FY12 and FY13 biennium, as constructed in September 2010, totaled more than \$530 million. Our General Fund budget in this fiscal year is about \$482 million, which is \$50 million less than what we needed to effectively operate just two years ago. And the \$482 million does not take into account the \$9.5 million in reductions that have been apportioned to the Branch this year through a combination of the Governor's November 2012 rescissions and the December 2012 deficit mitigation plan adopted by the Legislature.

Unquestionably, we had to make difficult cuts in order to balance the Judicial Branch's current budget. We reduced the number of days that our judge trial referees could work by 15%, as well as the number of days that our temporary assistant clerks could work. We replaced only about one out of every seven employees who left the Branch, resulting in shortages in the number of courtroom staff. We also eliminated state police coverage outside certain courthouses. Additionally, we made significant cuts to our law libraries

and are no longer able to provide the services that we once did. I should just add that I recognize that all three Branches of government are struggling to provide an adequate level of service to the residents of our state.

Despite these reductions, we have done our best to meet our constitutional and statutory responsibilities. For example, we successfully implemented new legislative initiatives, albeit in some cases with modest delays. These include establishing a comprehensive Foreclosure Mediation Program to assist homeowners and lenders to achieve a mutually agreeable resolution to a mortgage foreclosure action through the mediation process, and effectively integrating 16-and 17-year-olds into Juvenile Court. This integration required the creation of a boys' residential substance abuse treatment program, a domestic violence intervention program, a psychiatric consultation service, mentoring, and vocational programming. In addition, capacity was increased for educational support services, court-based clinical assessments, sex offender treatment, basic needs, training and quality assurance. The creation and enhancement of these services, all evidence-based programs incorporating known best practices, have resulted in higher treatment and supervision completion rates and lower re-arrest rates for this age group than those 15 and younger.

In addition to meeting these statutory requirements, we continued to leverage technology to enhance our productivity. We have replaced our antiquated civil/family case management system, instituted electronic processing and payment of motor vehicle tickets and improved access to courtroom proceedings through the roll-out of the "For The Record" (FTR) digitized system.

Moving forward to the next biennium, our proposed General Fund budgets for FY14 and FY15 are \$516 million and \$538.5 million respectively. Please note that these numbers are \$6 million less than we originally requested and reflect the portion of the savings from this year's deficit mitigation efforts that we believe can be carried forward beyond FY 13.

I should mention that these figures and the allocation of funds among our major line items were requested by the Branch and are reflected as such in the Governor's proposed budget. This is due to a statutory change you made in 2010, when you recognized the Judicial Branch and the Legislature as co-equal branches of government, with the Executive Branch. The change requires that the Governor's proposed budget for the Judicial Branch, as well as for the Legislature, reflect the request of each respective Branch. Please allow me this opportunity to thank you for changing the manner in which the Judicial Branch's budget is presented to you.

Pursuant to Public Act 12-93, the budget includes \$1.8 million in FY14 and \$3.68 million in FY15 to implement the recommendations of the Commission on Judicial Compensation. This 12-member Commission, comprised of appointees from all three Branches of government, was charged with evaluating seven specific factors and making recommendations with respect to judicial salaries. The members carefully examined the factors, including the state's ability to fund increases, and issued a report in December

that presents compelling reasons why judges' salaries should be increased by 5.3% in each of the next four fiscal years. The amount recommended is consistent with, or in many cases less than, the increases that other employees will receive under the SEBAC agreement.

You may have noticed that the Branch's budget request for each year of the upcoming biennium is higher than our present budget. Using FY12's base of \$482 million, the proposed budget is \$33 million more in FY14 and \$56 million more in FY15. These increases are due, for the most part, to three factors, namely (1) collective bargaining increases; (2) the annualization of the costs associated with the "Raise the Age" initiative; and (3) higher costs across many line items that were calculated in accordance with OPM budget preparation guidelines.

In terms of the collective bargaining increases, 33% of the proposed budget increase for FY14 and 50% of the proposed increase in FY15 are the result of collective bargaining increases. As you know, unionized employees are guaranteed raises for the next three years under the SEBAC agreement. The Branch's proposed PS line item for FY14 includes more than \$12 million to fund these raises. In FY15, raises for unionized employees will have an aggregate cost of \$25 million.

Another \$7.1 million in both FY14 and FY15 reflect the cost of annualizing staff and programs associated with "Raise the Age." This represents 21.5% and 12.5% of the proposed budget increases in FY14 and FY15. Over the course of the next two fiscal years, we will add a new girls' residential substance abuse treatment program and a new vocational program. We will expand multi-dimensional family therapy, education advocates, school-based diversion, flex-funding to support pro-social activities, and evidence-based services for high-risk and gang-involved youth.

We are hopeful that the Committee will look favorably upon the proposed Judicial Branch budget for FY14 and FY15. We know that even if the budget is approved, we will continue to have to implement austerity measures and to prioritize where we spend the limited funding. We also know that cuts we make will impact the other two branches of government and we will do our very best to minimize any such impact.

During the past biennium, we have been able to implement new legislative initiatives, while also keeping intact existing programs and services that the Legislative and Executive Branches have established as priorities. This has been very challenging, as these programs and services now account for approximately 44% of all Branch expenditures. The result has been increased pressure on resources for the courts. For example, we have been hearing from judges around the state that they have had to delay the opening of court, because there aren't enough court monitors or courtroom clerks. This shortage has caused some delays in the resolution of cases.

Additionally, we struggle to maintain an acceptable number of judicial marshals to ensure the safety of members of the public who enter our courthouses, as well as the staff and judges who work in these facilities. Our budget, as proposed, will require that we

maintain 250 vacancies in FY14 and FY15. Additionally, the "back of the budget" language will require that we save an additional \$6.9 million in each year from the budget that is ultimately approved. One result is that our judicial marshal staffing will continue to be at least 100 marshals below what we believe is the appropriate level to safely staff all courts. In this context, we are in the midst of a comprehensive review of courthouse security and it is very possible that some of the enhancements we may need to pursue will result in costs that are not reflected in the proposed budgets for FY14 and FY15. We will certainly keep you apprised as this review continues.

Needless to say, it has been a challenging two years and we anticipate that the next two years will be just as challenging. Thank you for your willingness in the past to discuss these difficult issues of mutual concern and to work together for an equitable solution. I look forward to working together to address the new issues that will inevitably arise.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee and I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.